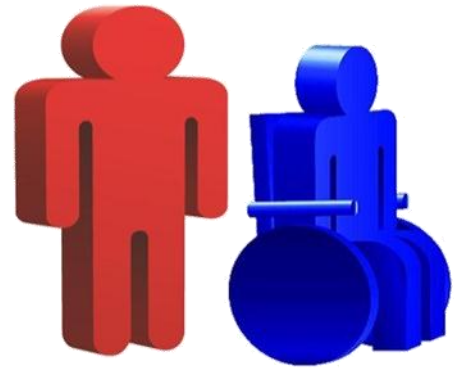


# Dialogue



*The newsletter of the Human Resources Division, October 2012*

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## **Disclosure of a Non-visible Disability**

By: Catherine Duffek, Office of Diversity & Equal Opportunity

There are scores of American workers with chronic invisible and disabling health conditions that are not immediately obvious. These conditions include diabetes, heart disease, cancer, epilepsy, sensory impairments such as reduced vision, mental illness such as bipolar disorder and depression, learning disabilities as well as many other medical conditions.

Employees with “invisible” conditions are often hesitant to reveal their disabilities for fear of being discriminated against or not having their concerns or challenges understood.

They also find it difficult to balance their privacy with the sharing of information about having chronic medical conditions with an employer.

No study has identified how many Americans have non-visible disabilities, but more than 18 percent of Americans report some level of disability according to the 2010 U.S. Census data.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Model Employer Initiative fosters an inclusive work environment where limitation is defined by talent, skill and energy. The philosophy of the Model Employer Initiative recognizes that one of the most difficult decisions employees with invisible disabilities have to make is whether to inform their ADA Coordinators or not about their disabilities.

In making this decision, employees should realize that not informing their ADA Coordinators about non-visible disabilities can create risk in three areas: health, safety and job performance.

For instance, an employee who has a grand mal seizure from long controlled epilepsy, about whose condition the employee’s manager and ADA Coordinator are unaware, puts herself in jeopardy from receiving prompt and appropriate medical treatment.

If the ADA Coordinator and manager are unaware that an employee has a non-visible disability the employee, the ADA Coordinator and the employee’s manager do not have the opportunity to create appropriate job accommodations. Without appropriate accommodations, the employee’s job performance may suffer. Unfortunately, the lack of knowledge about the disability does not afford the employee protection from being placed on a corrective action plan.



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When struggling with the issue to inform your ADA Coordinator about a non-visible disability consider that it has less to do with the law and more about common sense and ensuring that you maximize your potential as a productive employee in the workplace.

### MAKING THAT DECISION

Informing your ADA Coordinator and/ or Manager about a disability is very personal, but some of the following tips may be helpful in making that decision.

**Tip #1:** You can inform your ADA Coordinator about a disability at any time from application process to any time during employment.

Deciding when to disclose this information can be difficult. If you have a non-visible disability this decision can be an even bigger dilemma.

Remember that you are not required to self-identify as having a disability.

However, when you know that there is a workplace barrier that is preventing you, due to the disability, from competing for a job, performing a job, or gaining equal access to a benefit of employment such as an employee lunch room or employee parking then you should seriously consider disclosing your disability and requesting an accommodation.

You are setting yourself up for failure if you need an accommodation and don't request it.

Additional reasons for disclosing a non-visible disability are:

To receive assistance in an emergency or as part of emergency preparedness planning;

To willingly communicate with others about circumstances (such as prolonged absence or changes in work space) that result from the person's disability.

### KNOWING WHO TO INFORM

**TIP #2:** Each Agency of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a series of appointed ADA Coordinators. To see the complete list, please go to [Massachusetts Office on Disability](#)

Your Agency ADA Coordinator will treat your confidential disclosure professionally and respectfully. Your information is kept in your Agency ADA Coordinators office in a locked file cabinet separate from your personnel file.



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### KNOW HOW TO DISCLOSE

**TIP #3:** According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), you only have to let your employer know that you need an adjustment or change at work for a reason related to a medical condition. You don't have to use complex vocabulary or legal terms to make your request and you don't have to mention the ADA or use the phrase "reasonable accommodation." Once you disclose, then your employer can only ask for limited information that verifies that you have a disability, how that disability impacts you doing the essential functions of your job and your need for accommodations.

An employee or applicant does not need to complete the self-identification form to be eligible for a reasonable accommodation.

In summary, the decision to disclose a disability is an individual, voluntary choice. The worksite accommodations can help by maximizing your potential as a productive employee in the workplace. Self-disclosure also provides you with appropriate assistance during an emergency or in emergency planning. Lastly, disability self-disclosure opens your communication with others about prolonged absences or needed changes in workspace.



### **Beyond Diversity ... towards Inclusion**

By: Allan B. Motenko, Massachusetts Office on Disability

As National Disability Employment Awareness month comes to a close, we proudly reflect upon the Commonwealth's efforts to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in its workforce and in the delivery of government services.

Massachusetts is actively working to establish itself as a model employer of people with disabilities, and the Executive Branch includes high level management positions to advise on equal opportunity and disability policies and programs. Accommodation requests are more common – and more encouraged – as the understanding grows that people with disabilities have great capacity as employees to benefit our agencies and society at large. As a result, the number of employees and managers who have self-identified as a person with a disability has grown by **65.0%** since the Model Employer initiative began in 2009.

We realize that effectuating an enterprise wide change takes educating all our employees – upper management as well as front line staff. To that end, we have already had **42%** of upper level managers, including Secretaries and Agency Heads attend a dynamic, half-day training on disability awareness in the workplace, and **41%** of Executive Branch employees participate in the on-line disability awareness training. All this is being offered as we work to continue to foster a more inclusive environment for employees with disabilities across state government.

To evaluate the strides that the Commonwealth has made with regard to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the delivery of government services, one need only look to the response to Hurricane Sandy. Before, during, and after the storm, information was made available in a variety of communication modes. Residents could access real-time storm and public safety information via the internet, by text-message, on television, and, in many communities, by “reverse 911” calls. On television, the Commonwealth worked with local stations to ensure that a sign language interpreter was visible at all times during press conferences, and most stations also had scrolling information at the bottom of their programming to keep citizens informed.

One need only to look at the Governor's website to see how seriously the commitment to effective communication is being realized in the Commonwealth: [Preparations-For-Hurricane-Sandy](#)

Our work is not done, but our accomplishments are many. Once again, as we bring a close to October and Disability Awareness month, we redouble our efforts to work toward a fully inclusive workforce.



### In Celebration of National Disability Awareness Month

Each year during National Disability Awareness Month, in addition to our Self- Identification Campaign, the Commonwealth has an extraordinary opportunity to share a glimpse of activities various executive branch agencies have planned to engage our workforce, while highlighting some of our achievements.

Juanita Allen, Recruitment and Outreach Manager in the Human Resources Division's Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity, during one of her many community outreach events met a teacher from Malden High School, who was interested in having her students learn more about employment opportunities in state government. Highlighting the state as a Model Employer, Juanita organized a career exploration workshop for the students.

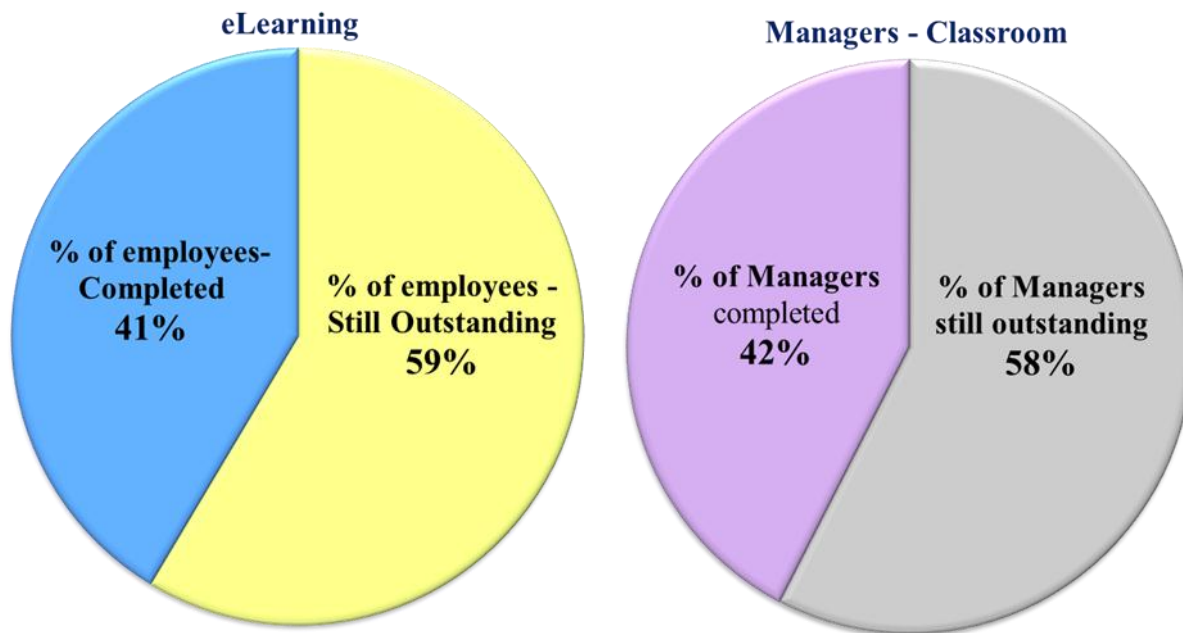
The goal of the workshop was to start a dialogue and create an environment where students would learn about the many facets of State Government. In addition, they would hear first- hand from a hiring manager, about their expectations of employees from the interview through employment. Lastly, they would view job postings on the Commonwealth Employment Opportunities (CEO) website and step through the various knowledge, skills and abilities needed to fill a position.

**Students from Malden High School - Career Exploration Workshop**



## Where we are on the Journey to Training Compliance

**Figure 1.** The Percentage of Executive Branch employees who've completed the Disability Awareness training



As a reminder, the deadlines for completing the Diversity Part II – Disability Awareness Training are as follows:

**eLearning** – December 29, 2012

**Manager ½ Day Classroom** – February 28, 2013

If you have not taken the training, please go to PACE to take the eLearning and/or register for the classroom training. You can access [PACE](http://www.Mass.GOV/PACE) at [www.Mass.GOV/PACE](http://www.Mass.GOV/PACE)

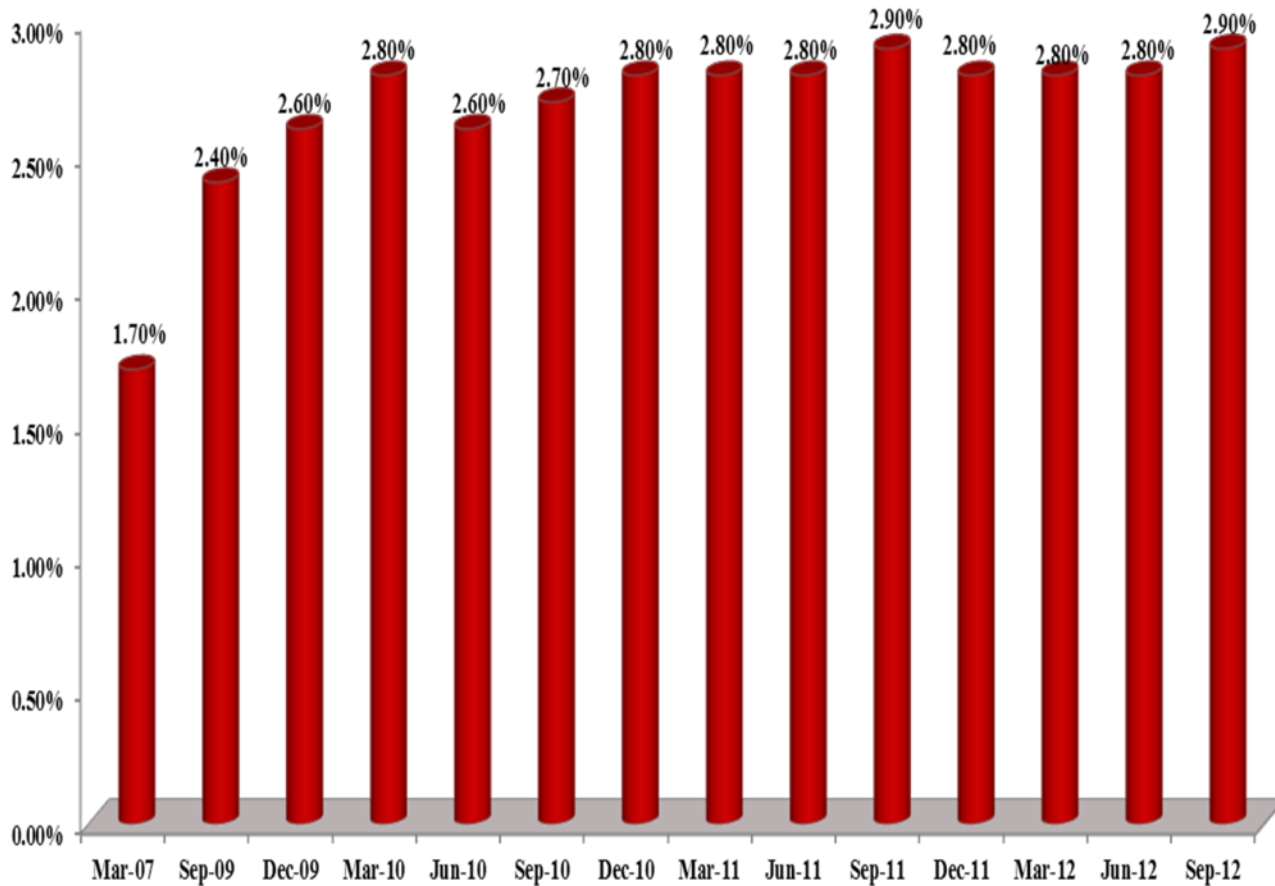
If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact your training liaison or Sandra Borders at (617) 878-9830.

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## ARE WE MAKING PROGRESS?

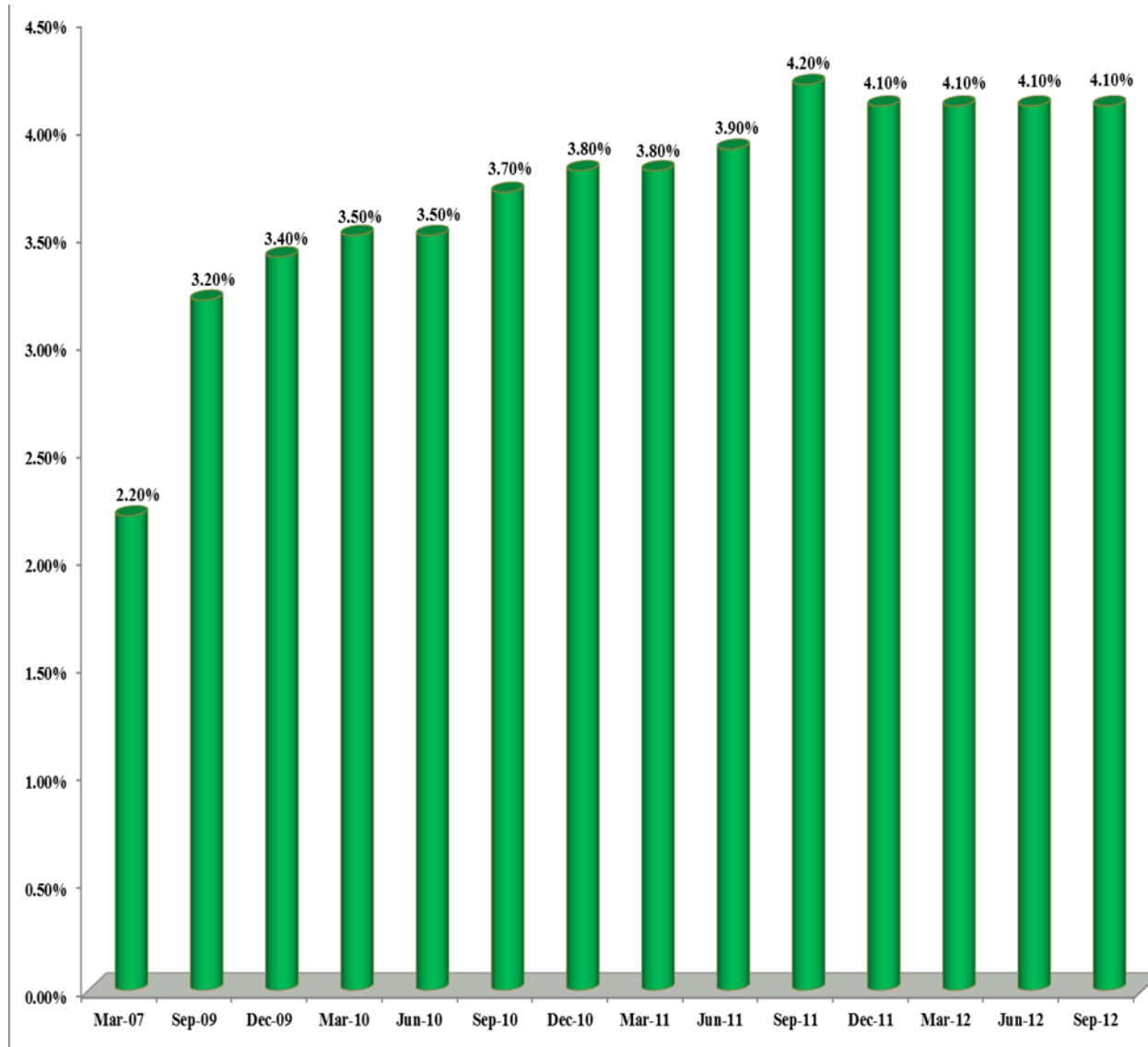
**Figure 2.**

The Percentage of Self-Identified **Executive Branch Employees** from March 2007 to September 2012



**Figure 3.**

The Percentage of Self-Identified **Executive Branch Management Employees** from March 2007 to September 2012

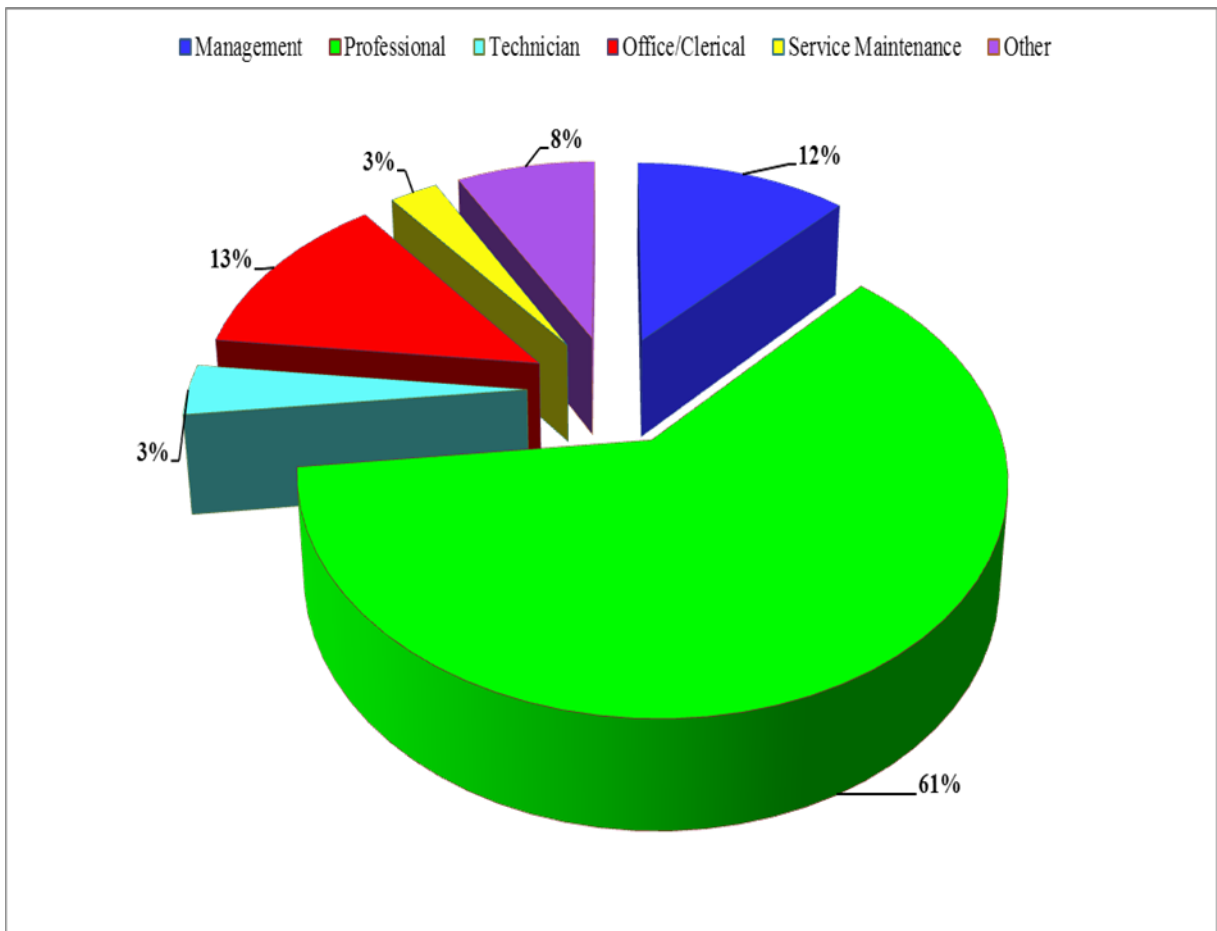




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**Figure 4.**

The Percentage of Self-identified Executive Branch Managers and Employees by EEO-4 Job Category as of close of Quarter 1, FY13



**Note:** Other Positions include Protected Service Positions (sworn and non-sworn) and Skilled Craft Position